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JANET'S ATTACK ON MATERIALISM.*

BEFORE we say a word about the merits of the book before us, we will make one or two extracts from the translator's preface :—"The Sorbonne has never lacked spirited and eloquent advocates, to maintain the *true* principles of metaphysical science. The standard of *sound* teaching is still borne aloft." And since the year 1857, M. Paul Janet "has never ceased by his pen or in the lecture-room protesting against the *errors*"—of what ? Now we have no hesitation in predicting that our readers already know which side the author and translator have taken up. It is quite unnecessary to tell them that the "errors" are those of the modern materialistic school.

What a comfort it must be to those good people, who never accept an invitation to tea without promising to go if God will let them, to know that they can never make a mistake. How delightful it must be for them to know whenever they have been under a shower-bath, and felt the benefit of it, that they have been under God at the same time. There is only one thing about these good people that we have never been able to understand, and that is why they persistently ignore the teachings of the Bible in which they affect to believe. We have, for instance, some recollection of meeting in that book with the excellent precept, "judge not that ye be not judged." Yet these excessively good people are always the first to do precisely what the Pharisee did in the temple, to thank God that they are not as other men.

From the extracts that we have already made it will be seen that Mr. Masson is a Pharisee of unimpeachable belief. And he has translated a book which is thoroughly Pharisaical, yet not by any means orthodox. Dr. Janet knows he is right just as much as Mr. Masson or Dr. Cumming. But his certainty is of a kind which would horrify both the Evangelical Alliance and the priests of St. Alban's, Holborn. Dr. Janet is certain only that Dr. Büchner and Mr. Darwin are wrong, and maintains nothing but an incomprehensible will.

An incomprehensible will is, without doubt, a very fine thing in its way, but we submit that this is not the teaching of the Bible. We have been taught from our youth upwards that God showed his back parts unto Moses ; and that has always appeared to us an intelligible proceeding. Back parts necessarily imply front parts ; and from back

* *The Materialism of the Present Day.* By Paul Janet. Translated from the French by Gustave Masson, B.A. London : Ballière.

parts and front parts it is not difficult to infer top parts and bottom parts—in short, the entire man, which we believe is the only idea that any one ever clearly conceived to himself of the entire God.

But this is by no means the teaching of M. Janet. He, on the contrary, says :—

“As a run-away horse carried on by blind impetuosity in his reckless career might follow a thousand various directions, but under the guidance and authority of a skilful rider, takes only one course which leads him to the appointed end ; so, blind nature, constrained from the beginning by the power of an incomprehensible will, and directed by an unknown master, is everlastingly progressing by a graduated movement full of greatness and of splendour, towards the eternal ideal, the desire of which possesses and animates it.”

Of course if any man likes to write this kind of stuff, he is certain to be well received by a particular class ; but we need hardly point out that such writing is quite outside the province of science. The first thing required of any scientific proposition is that it should be intelligible ; and Dr. Janet at once puts himself out of court by confessing that his first principles are incomprehensible.

We, however, agree with the author of this book, so far as to allow that however far we may go back we come at last to something incomprehensible. But an incomprehensible will signifies no more to us than an incomprehensible Abracadabra. An incomprehensible and infinite impotence is just as intelligible to us, just as useful a formula of belief, as an incomprehensible and infinite omnipotence. No doubt, when the Büchnerists and Darwinists assert that their systems explain everything (which, by the way, we believe Mr. Darwin does not assert), they lay themselves open to attack. They have not explained, and they never can explain, everything. But the fact that the dogmatic atheists are wrong, is in no way evidence that the dogmatic theists are right. Neither party has the slightest tittle of evidence to rely upon.

It is perhaps right that the belief in an incomprehensible will should be finally expressed in an incomprehensible sentence. And thus the book ends :—

“Let us conclude with them against the champions of a blind mechanism, that an unknown law directs the progress of things towards an end unceasingly receding, but the absolute type of which is precisely the very cause from which the stream once of old issued forth by an incomprehensible operation.”

We submit that if all things progress towards an end unceasingly receding they perform a more incomprehensible operation than any dreamt of by Dr. Janet. If the end recedes unceasingly it must recede at the same speed with the “things,” at greater speed or at less. If at the same speed, or at greater speed, it is quite clear that

the "things" do not progress relatively to the end at all; if at less speed, it is equally clear that the "things" must overtake the end at some time or other, and the end does not recede unceasingly. We have no notion what the absolute type may be, because there is nothing to show whether it is the type of the end, the things, the progress, the law, the mechanism or the champion. But this possibly is the fault of the translator. We have not seen the original.

We have spoken somewhat severely, but let it not be supposed that we have not a good word to say of Dr. Janet. He has written a very concise and clear *résumé* of the history of German philosophy since the time of Hegel, and has given a fair abstract of Dr. Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*, with a shorter and somewhat less satisfactory account of the Darwinian theory.

In the chapter on German philosophy we noticed some very remarkable passages extracted from German authors. Dr. Büchner is quoted by Dr. Janet to this effect:—"It is nearly thirty years since the Germans have been making transcendental science. If they once become aware of it they will find themselves very ridiculous." But this is nothing to Schopenhauer who, according to Dr. Janet, has thus expressed himself:—"Dilute a minimum of thought into five hundred pages of nauseous phraseology, and trust for the rest to the truly German patience of the reader." This is a German recipe for making a philosophical reputation in Germany.

PIKE ON THE ORIGIN OF THE ENGLISH.*

MR. PIKE's book has met with more attention at the hands of the leading reviews than has perhaps been ever accorded to an anthropological work by the critics who aspire to be the fuglemen in general literature of the reading public. This may be partly due to the growing interest taken by that public in the science of man, but is certainly not wholly so; for even those who are least disposed to agree with the author's conclusions, must give him credit for the learning and ability he has displayed in his attempt to show their probability.

Mr. Froude, by the publication of the later volumes of his history, has stirred up in Scotland the smouldering embers of the controversy between the pro-Marian and the anti-Marian parties. Nearly three

* *The English and their Origin; a Prologue to Authentic English History.* By Luke Owen Pike, M.A., F.A.S.L., Barrister-at-Law. London: Longmans.